

Good evening.

My name is Sharon Friedman. I am here this evening to address the proposed elimination of the Rehabilitation program of the Workers' Compensation Commission.

This program assists injured workers, who have suffered serious injuries that are so severe that they cannot return to their regular jobs. These are the people whose houses are being foreclosed, who are at the end of their workers' compensation benefits, who have exhausted unemployment benefits, and still have families to support. These are the very people the Governor claims he is most concerned about. One would hope that a program that assists people in getting jobs would not be eliminated in this recessionary climate.

Workers' Rehabilitation Services provides people who have significant injuries, with guidance and counseling, training and placement services, so they may acquire new skills and return to a new and physically appropriate job. This allows them to become productive again and able to contribute to society.

The Rehabilitation program is a **statutorily mandated program (31-283a)** that provides services for employees suffering compensable injuries that are so severe that they cannot return to their regular jobs. Workers' Rehabilitation Services is a program that is supported by the community, the insurance carriers and businesses alike. **The funding for this program is derived from an assessment against insurance carriers. The elimination of this Rehabilitation program does NOT save any money.** What are we to say to the people we have already committed funds for the next fiscal year? Training programs do not start and stop on a fiscal year basis. If the Rehabilitation program is eliminated, what happens to these people?

This budget has to be about jobs and getting people back to work. Since the beginning of this fiscal year, three staff and one supervisor have already returned 225 injured workers to gainful employment. Were it not for this program, these people would not be working and paying taxes. This is a considerable number in light of the most severe economic downturn that Connecticut has seen.

If you choose not to place monies back into the budget for this program, Connecticut will have the only Workers Compensation Commission in the country, without a rehabilitation program to assist injured workers in returning to work.

Thank you for your time.


